



Don't confuse IT Asset Management and Configuration Management



With the growing popularity of IT management solutions that take advantage of the combined benefits of IT Service Management and IT Asset Management (see this white paper), there is also increasing confusion between IT asset management and configuration management.

This confusion is perhaps compounded when IT asset management functionality is delivered within IT service management software, as with management packs that bring IT asset management to Microsoft System Center – Service Manager.

Configuration management is not IT Asset management.

Confusion translates to serious consequence when configuration information is inappropriately used in place of properly sourced and managed IT asset data:

- It makes it impossible to manage IT assets across the entire life cycle;
- It prevents the proper implementation of IT asset management processes based on best practice; and,
- Configuration information does not necessarily provide precise or suitable enough data for IT asset management.

Configuration information derived from IT operational management tools should never be used as a substitute for IT asset management data sources like ERP (enterprise resource planning) and finance systems.



IT Asset Management and Configuration Items in Microsoft System Center - Service Manager

Confused? While the Provance IT Asset Management Pack runs natively within Microsoft System Center to bring supplemental capability and tight functional integration to Service Manager, all IT asset management data is maintained in dedicated classes in the CMDB and no properties are populated from other Configuration Items.

Unfortunately, to really confuse matters there are other commercial IT asset management software that completely blurs the line and populates IT asset properties from configuration items and operates in the Configuration Items workspace.

Configuration Management and the IT asset life cycle

Configuration management software like Microsoft System Center – Configuration Manager gathers inventory and usage information about hardware and software to support IT management. Much of this data is also important and useful in supporting the IT asset management function; however, configuration management software can only gather data while the target assets are operating and connected to your network.

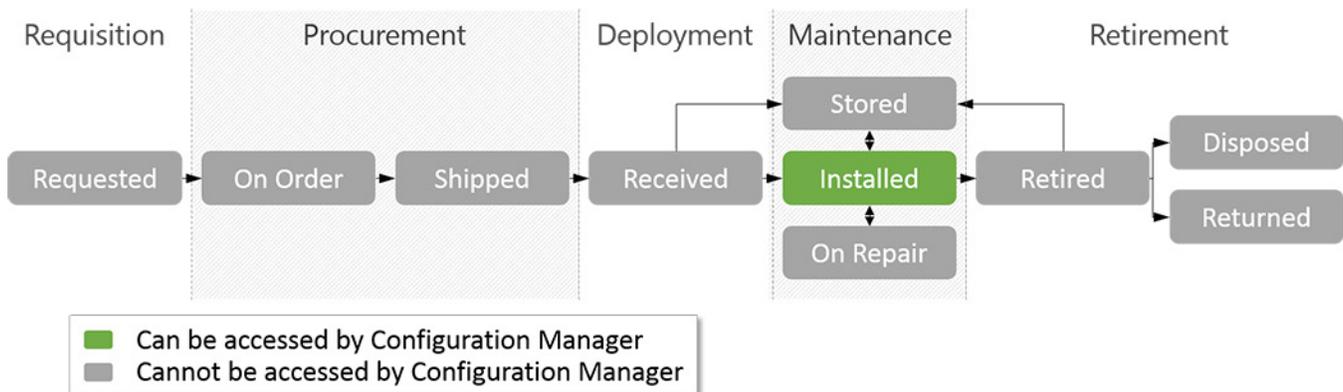


Figure 1

IT assets are only operating and connected to the network for a portion of their overall life cycle. As you can see in figure 1 (above), Configuration Manager can only gather data from active IT assets with an “Installed” status, which occurs only during the Maintenance portion of the five-stage life cycle. Even during the Maintenance life cycle, assets are not always operational and connected. For example, assets that are in storage, broken assets that are out for repair, off line mobile assets, and non-network aware assets cannot be accessed by Configuration Manager.

It’s impossible to manage assets through the entire life cycle if you are reliant on configuration data.

Let’s say you depend on the configuration items that Configuration Manager creates in the Service Manager CMDB to populate properties of your hardware asset records. For example, you use the primary user property to determine the asset user, the manufacturer and model number properties for the asset make and model, and you use the IP address property to associate the asset with a physical location based on subnet ranges.

Looks good on paper. It’s automated, it’s easy and it leverages your existing Configuration Manager deployment and the out-of-the-box Service Manager connector. But without configuration items, how do you create a record for an asset before it’s operational, through the Requisition, Procurement and Deployment life cycle states? What happens when an asset is in storage or out for repair and can no longer be accessed by Configuration Manager? How do you retain records for audit and accounting purposes for assets that are retired or disposed? What happens to asset records after the default 90 day period beyond which an undiscovered computer’s configuration item is deleted? What happens if you remove the Service Manager connector to Configuration Manager, which will delete all the configuration

IT Asset Management: It's all about process

Reliance on configuration items doesn't just make it impossible to manage assets across the entire life cycle. It prevents you from using proper processes to effectively manage your IT assets according to best practices.

One of the primary purposes of IT asset management is to ensure that your actual environment is deployed the way it should be: Are the right people using the right assets in the right place and in the right way?

IT asset management allows you to build a view of the planned or expected environment based on financial and organizational information. It allows you to keep track of who purchased (owns) the assets and from whom, what assets belong where (both physically and organizationally), who should be using the assets, and so forth.

Configuration information provides you with a view of the actual environment based on automated scanning of deployed assets. It provides you with important information for managing performance, such as memory, processors, IP and MAC addresses, installed software, usage, primary user, etc.

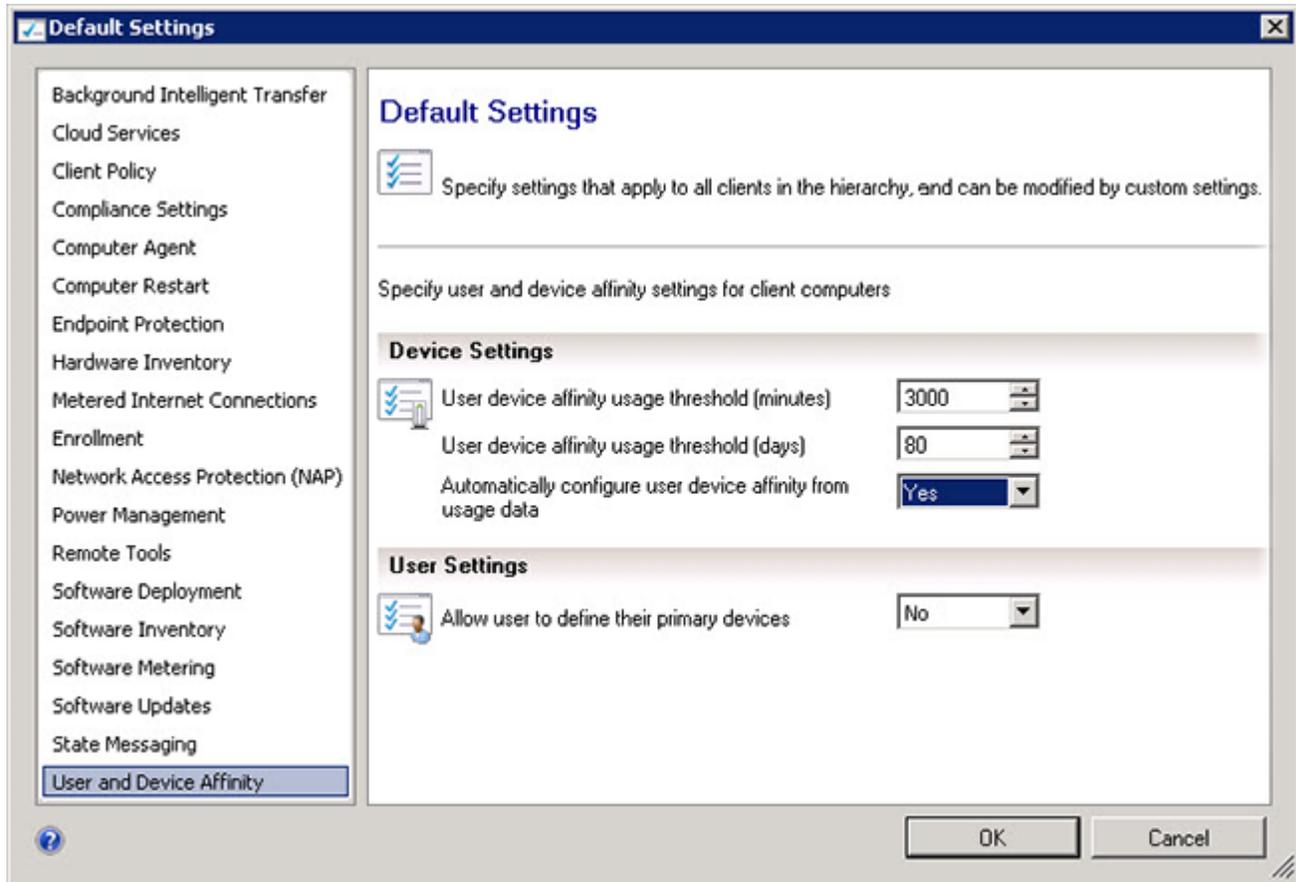
Comparing IT asset management information with configuration information allows you to compare the planned and actual environments, and then reconcile differences. For example, if a computer is assigned to one user, but is being used by a different primary user, it's important to find out why, and take corrective action. Similarly, if a computer is assigned to one location, but is discovered in another location, the discrepancy needs to be properly resolved according to a defined process.

When you use configuration information to populate or automatically change IT asset properties, you destroy your ability to perform this core function of IT asset management.

It's not about managing data, it's about managing assets. Only asset records created and maintained independently from configuration information allow you to see variances of the actual environment from what it should be, and follow proper processes to make corrections.

Configuration Information: Not suitable for IT asset management

Finally, in many cases configuration information is simply not suitable or not reliable enough for IT asset management purposes. For example, Configuration Manager determines the primary user of a computer; however, this can be determined many different ways. Depending on the user device affinity settings the Configuration Manager system administrator has used, the main user of a computer might be the most recent user. Or it might be the most frequent user. Or there might be more than one primary user.



Similarly, using IP address to determine a computer’s physical whereabouts will seldom provide a precise or even accurate location. Few IT organizations optimize IP address subnet allocation to readily map to locations as they’re defined for IT asset management. Those that do are not able to get very granular, to the point of specifying room or cubical, floor, etc. In some scenarios, automatically updating and determining asset location assignment based on IP address is simply not suitable or practical. For example, increasingly mobile workforces using devices and accessing networks from “locations” like Starbucks, airport lounges, hotels and other public WiFi hotspots.

Don’t confuse IT asset management and configuration management

Microsoft System Center – Service Manager provides a central Configuration Management Database (CMDB) and out-of-the-box connectors that bring in a rich collection of Configuration Items to support IT management; however, resist the temptation to take a dependency on this data for IT asset management! Confusing IT asset management and configuration management will make it impossible for you to properly manage assets through the entire life cycle.